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Martin Borg

Nature and Landscape Photography 71 Tips from the Top



Nature and Landscape Photography

Martin Borg

Editor: Gerhard Rossbach Translation: David Schlesinger Copyeditor: Julie Simpson Layout and Type: Petra Strauch Cover Design: Anna Diechtierow Printer: Tallinna Raamatutrükikoja OÜ Printed in Estonia

ISBN 978-1-933952-86-4

1st Edition 2011 © 2011 by Martin Borg

Rocky Nook Inc. 26 West Mission Street Ste 3 Santa Barbara, CA 93101

www.rockynook.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Borg, Martin, [Natur & landskap English] Nature and landscape photography: 71 tips from the top / Martin Borg. -- 1st ed. ISBN 978-1-933952-86-4 (pbk.) 1. Nature photography. 2. Landscape photography. I. Title. TR721.B6713 2011 779'.36--dc23

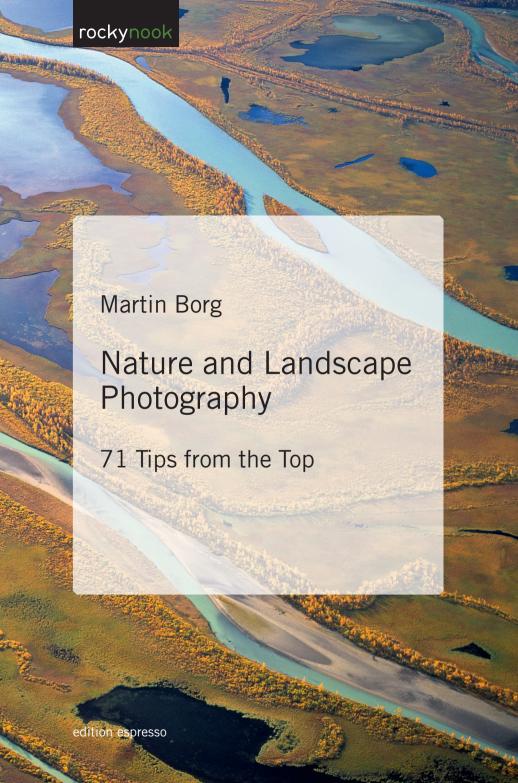
2011016613

Distributed by O'Reilly Media 1005 Gravenstein Highway North Sebastopol, CA 95472

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Contents

Foreword	7
The Foundation	8
Equipment	8
Digital Polishing	9
Keep the Joy Alive	9

Thoughtful Photography

10

Nature photography can't be rushed. With a little technical know-how, some preparation, and a touch of patience, you'll be able to seize the right moment when it arises. The trick is to know where to look.

Finding the Rhythm

26

Landscape and nature photography provides the rare opportunity to consider image composition at length. There are only a few rules, but the list of potential subjects is endless.

Capturing Light

42

Without light, there'd be no photography. But some of the best images are created in diminished light, like twilight. If you've heeded the weather forecast and paid attention to the time of day, all you need are some snacks while you wait for the perfect moment.

Landscapes

56

Broad viewpoints either require expansive vision or, just the opposite, a narrowed perspective. It depends entirely on what type of photograph you'd like to take. One thing is for sure—landscape photos have a special allure.

The Details of Nature

72

If the sublime is too daunting, turn instead to the trivial. With an attentive eye you're sure to find countless details and small surprises in the natural world. Go and stumble upon them.

Water 84

Water can be placed, but it can also be forceful. It can be rapid or frozen, rushing or reflective. Few natural phenomena are as multifaceted. It's no wonder there are so many tricks for exposing water effectively.

Unleash Your Creativity

98

Preconceived notions or prejudices about what nature or landscape photography is can be limiting. Take it to the edge and beyond. Don't worry about the rules.

Taking the Next Steps

112

Nature photographers often toil under the burden of reproducing the wonder of nature in their images, but rarely will photographs recreate the feeling inspired by an actual landscape. Are you really sure of what you see? If not, use this mystery to your advantage and make it a part of your images.

Epilogue 126
Index 127

Foreword

I was about twenty years old when I held my first camera. At that time photography was not a particular interest of mine; nor was nature. But I do remember being fascinated by big, complex drawings as a child. I would search these images for exciting details much the same way we let our gaze wander across landscapes. I used to seek out illustrated books on our large bookshelf at home and set myself up in a cozy nook to browse at my leisure. Images captured my attention at an early age.

This spark of curiosity transferred directly into my discovery of nature photography. I liked the search for exciting and interesting environments and the calm of the creative process. A new world of creating images opened for me, and it was perfect. Initially, the camera was more important to me than my interest in nature. The photos that I took fused with my actual experience of a place—photography and experiencing nature quickly became one and the same for me.

Twenty years later, nothing's changed. The images themselves hold the attraction for me, but this attraction couldn't have been sustained had it not been supported by a love of nature. On days when I don't have the chance to take to the trail, and I have to resign myself to gazing out my window, the desire to get outside and take photos swells, and plans for future adventures quickly take shape. The temptation remains, and always will: no photograph is better than the one I'll take tomorrow.

The Foundation

Our boots are what distinguish us as nature photographers. We use the same equipment as other photographers, and even our basic conceptual understanding is indistinguishable from other disciplines that deal with images—those that require the use of cameras as well as those that don't. The only thing that truly sets us apart is where we create our photographs.

As nature photographers we're forced to make use of outdoor conditions—such as light, weather, and terrain—and to accept the interplay of these elements at various times of day. This makes our situation seem more or less out of our hands; there's nothing we can do but work with what's available to us and learn how to turn these conditions to our advantage. These circumstances demand two indispensible traits: enthusiasm and creativity.

The Equipment

There are two items you must unquestionably have with you for any photography foray: a camera and a tripod. Strictly speaking, anything else is optional. If I were forced to choose only one or two other items, a thermos and a couple of buttered rolls would be higher on my list than any photographic accessory. As you develop your skills, it's best to figure out what equipment you need as you go along instead of purchasing things up front that you may never use.

A modern digital camera is simple and practical, but the model, resolution, and additional capabilities are completely dependent on your budget and your ambition. When deciding what type of camera to buy, consider your goals. Are you hoping to sell your images to a photo agency or use your images for other commercial purposes? If so, you'll need a camera that can produce high-resolution images. Are you taking photos for your own enjoyment? Then you can do with a less powerful machine. Devote some thought to your purpose and make your decisions accordingly.

You'll need at least three fixed focal length lenses: a wide-angle lens, a normal lens, and a short or medium telephoto lens. Zoom lenses are also practical and enable you to overcome many challenges. Lenses with a macro function that make close-up photos possible also prove useful.

A tripod is essential, both to make the process easier and to facilitate the use of long exposure times. And aside from this, using one will make you look truly professional. Don't be tempted go for an inexpensive—and likely shaky—model; look for one that's really stable and has a mount that enables you to position your camera in any way you find useful.

Regarding filters, I have two recommendations above all: a polarizing filter to deal with unwanted reflections and increase color saturation, and

a graduated neutral density (ND) filter to tone down the contrast between the sky and the rest of your image. Both filters should be used sparingly.

Digital Polishing

Nature and landscape images can't be created in front of a computer—they're produced on location in the natural world. Most digital editing should be done with the goal of creating a final image that is as similar as possible to reality. With that said, digital editing is not to be ignored; it is an effective and precise tool for developing photographs with difficult lighting or a broad range of color tones, for example.

Correcting the white balance (in other words, adjusting the color for the lighting conditions during the exposure), adjusting the brightness and color saturation, and cropping images can create fundamental changes that are important for all photographs. The sky is often too bright in landscape photos, a problem that can easily be fixed with the careful application of a digital gray filter. Small adjustments to contrast can give images their final polish.

Your general aim should be to make finished images as true to reality as possible, unless, of course, you're working with truly creative and experimental photographs. In those cases, there's no reality to approximate and no rules to heed.

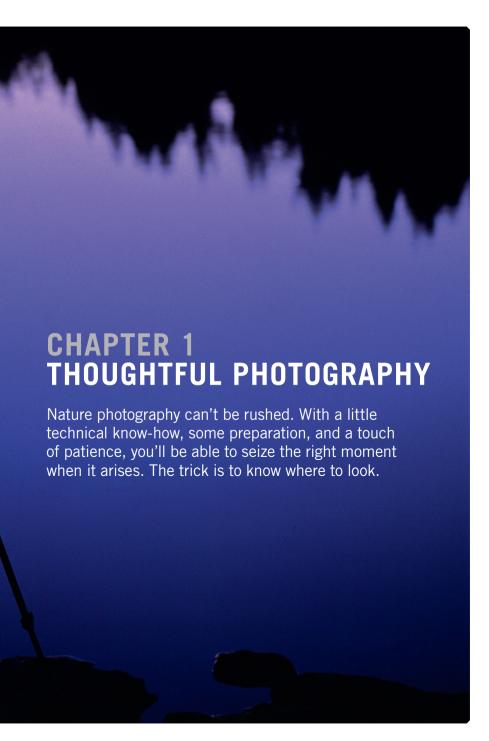
Keep the Joy Alive

Taking photos of nature should be fun; the process should be relaxed and delightful regardless of whether you use your camera to document a moment in time or as a means to create art. Although it's great to refine your skills and increase the quality of your images, too much theory or seriousness will suffocate the pleasure of the process.

This book provides 71 concrete tips for taking photographs artfully and dealing with problems that commonly arise when working in nature. Hopefully these ideas and images will inspire you to think of even more ways to achieve new perspectives in your craft. Examining photographs taken by others, regardless of whether they are good or not, is always a useful starting point for bettering your own abilities as a photographer.

There's no right or wrong when it comes to setting up a nature photograph—this isn't a science. It's more about having fun, allowing your creativity to have free rein, and discovering how much better you can feel after a few hours in the forest with your camera. Nature and landscape photography is first-class relaxation, recreation, and excitement all in one—a combination that's hard to beat.







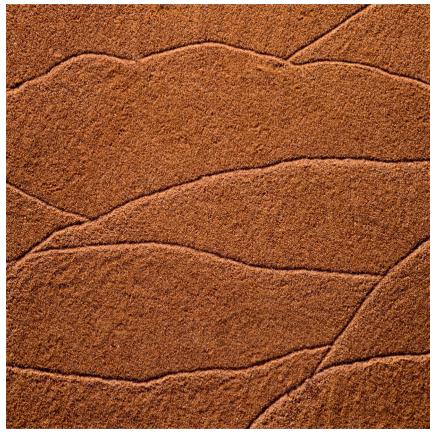


1 Up and at 'Em

To capture truly enthralling nature and landscape images, there's no avoiding it: you've got to beat the sun out of bed. This photo, for example, was taken in the middle of the night, at 2:15 a.m. (in Norway). Hard though it may be, if you can shake off your weaker self and pull yourself from your warm bed, you won't regret it. Morning twilight brings out the best of the natural world—early morning fog, moonlight reflecting on calm waters and makes every landscape shimmer in its fullest glory. Even if it means missing out on a few hours of sleep, it is well worth it to get an early start to a day of shooting.

* A note from the editor: In the caption for each photo you will find the following information about how the image was captured: camera model, focal length, aperture, and shutter speed. This photo, for example, was taken with an HBL, or a Hasselblad camera. The caption will also note if a filter was used for the exposure.

While many of these photos were taken with professional cameras, an amateur photographer can often attain the same results with an advanced compact or introductory reflex camera using the settings provided in the captions.



Stenshuvud National Park, Skåne, southern Sweden

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/8, 1/60 SFC.

2 Searching for Harmony

Nature is teeming with patterns and lines—the fundamental elements of a photograph. As photographers, we attempt to bring order to the chaos and present our subject in a pleasant or engaging manner. To do this, we must determine the right amount of information to include in our images. If we cram too much in, the image loses its form, and busyness overwhelms the viewer. Because of this, it's important to edit out anything that isn't essential to your subject. This idea applies to all images, regardless of whether there are physical lines and patterns in the image. A grove of trees, an assortment of stones, a tuft of grass—whatever the case, arrange the content of your image so that it works harmonically and effectively.

3 Recognizing the Right Opportunities

The two cows in this photo posed in unison for a fleeting five seconds, at most. I had my camera set atop my tripod and pointed in a completely different direction when I spotted them out of the corner of my eye. In a brief moment, I managed to lift the camera from the tripod, level it in relation to the water, and snap the image hastily. When I looked up again, the brown cow had turned and the moment had already passed.

Anyone who specializes in nature photography knows that moments like these—moments that suddenly imbue a scene with an added charm—will assuredly come up again. In preparation for the future, try to remember those times when you didn't manage to react quickly enough. If there is a trick for not missing these moments it is nothing more than to be attentive, open, and sensitive to what's around you. Nature isn't scripted by a director, so there will always be unexpected surprises—and that is exactly what accounts for its beauty and charm.

Lillholmsudd, on the island of Öland, Sweden

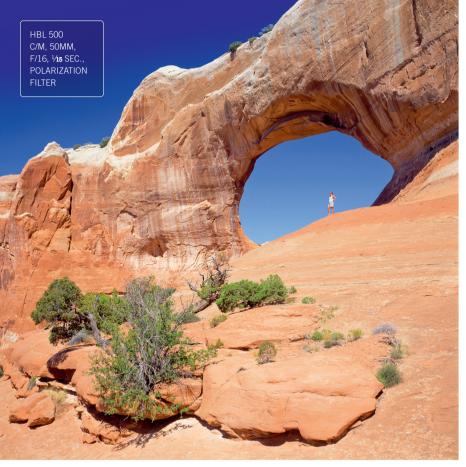


4 Less is More



Nature encompasses a veritable disarray of details, colors, forms, and impressions that all run together. It's futile to attempt to pack as much of this as possible into your images; conversely, the rewards are numerous if you select your subjects wisely and arrange them simply. Less is more, as the saying goes. You can't go wrong if you take an extra step toward your subject or zoom in a little more. Images that were intricately designed with the best of intentions often end up disappointing because they're too busy. If you stumble across an old wooden boat in twilight, for example, concentrate on this subject alone and ignore the tempting unusual shadows and the beautiful reed nearby. These subjects might be worth their own photo in the end.





Wilson Arch, Utah, USA

5 Don't Forget About People

Nature photographers often fall into the trap of thinking that nothing besides pure nature can appear in their images. If evidence of civilization or, even worse, an actual person sneaks into a photograph, the results can be catastrophic. But aren't humans a part of nature too? As time goes on, I've developed the habit of taking more and more photos with people in them. Any landscape photo's composition can benefit from including the human form. Admittedly, when people do appear in nature photos, they should blend in to the scene naturally and not in a posed fashion—this latter type of photograph is best kept for the family album. A vast landscape that includes a person, who appears diminutive by comparison, creates a totally different impression than an image without this reference of scale. The presence of a person affects the way a viewer can access the image; in some ways, the viewer can project himself or herself directly into the scene. So go ahead and allow people into your nature photos.

6 Beginning at Your Front Door

There's no need to go to great lengths to find what's already right at home. This advice lends itself to many circumstances, including the photography of nature. It's easy to lose sight of what's right in front of you, but if you take the time to reconsider your familiar environs you'll find a slew of new and exciting subjects. Grab your camera the next time you take the dog out for a walk or ride your bike to work. How often have you stumbled on a magical moment of unique lighting or an unusual subject only to lament that your camera was at home? Imagine you are a tourist in your own town (in fact, there are probably people who spend good money to vacation where you live). What would you photograph? I took this photo in a beech grove not far from my home. I'd been familiar with the forest for many years, but had never taken photos there.

HBL H3DII-39, 40MM, F/32, 1 SEC.



7 Discovering New Environs

HBL 500 C/M, 250MM, F/8, 2 SFC.

Just as taking a closer look at your home for new subjects can be rewarding, so too is travelling to new places in order to jumpstart your passion for photography. Nature photography is integrally related to the joy of discovery. It's not important to travel far, but if you make it a regular habit you'll nourish your imagination with a steady stream of new experiences. You'll be faced with a variety of new challenges and you'll be forced to figure out ways to capture landscapes and to document the subjects that interest you.





8 Keeping an Eye on the Weather

A camera, long underwear, and a good weather forecast are, without a doubt, a nature photographer's best friends. Here, "good" doesn't necessarily mean beautiful. The photo on this page was taken on a three-day trip, for which I'd been watching the weather closely (through the use of several webcams that allowed me to monitor the progression of fall colors). In addition to being prepared, I also lucked out: the sun came out at just the right time and as soon as I started heading south to return home, it began to storm and the leaves started to blow wildly around me.

Today there are excellent weather forecast services that provide information about cloud cover and precipitation in specific areas, among other things that make a nature photographer's heart race. You can take a photo of any subject in any weather, but an accurate weather forecast is always a boon when you're out in the field. Does the sky look cloudless this morning? Will winter bring snow today? Is this miserable rain ever going to stop? Always watch the weather closely.

LINHOF TECHNICA 9×12 WITH 6×12 FILM, 210MM, F/11, ½5 SEC.





Lofoten, Norway

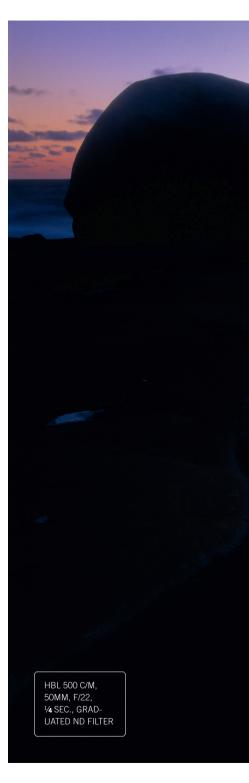
HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/5.6, 1/4 SEC.

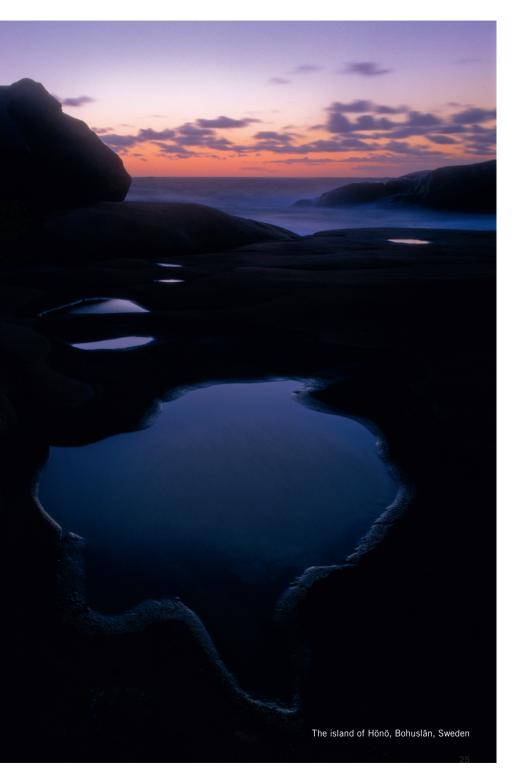
9 Make It Fun

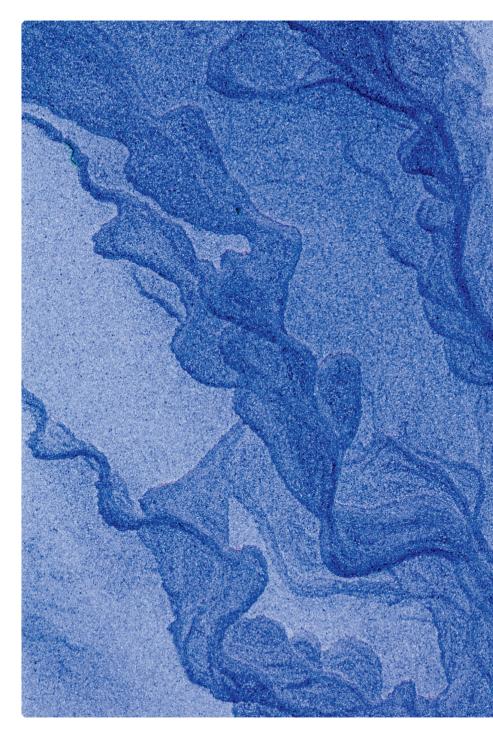
People don't become nature photographers without truly wanting to. For the right person, this work can be incredibly thrilling and downright fun. Nothing beats the combination of experiencing nature's beauty while taking photos of her subjects. If you're of the same mind, you're one of us, no matter how you spend your days. Capturing images like this one provides serenity and a terrific satisfaction. I attribute this to our age-old hunter-gatherer instinct; humans are predisposed to seek subjects in nature and bring them home. Taking time to sojourn in a natural environment is a basic need for many. Being a nature photographer at heart comes with a drawback too: any time your camera is not around your neck you have to live with feeling half naked. But then again, nothing's really keeping you from going to get it ...

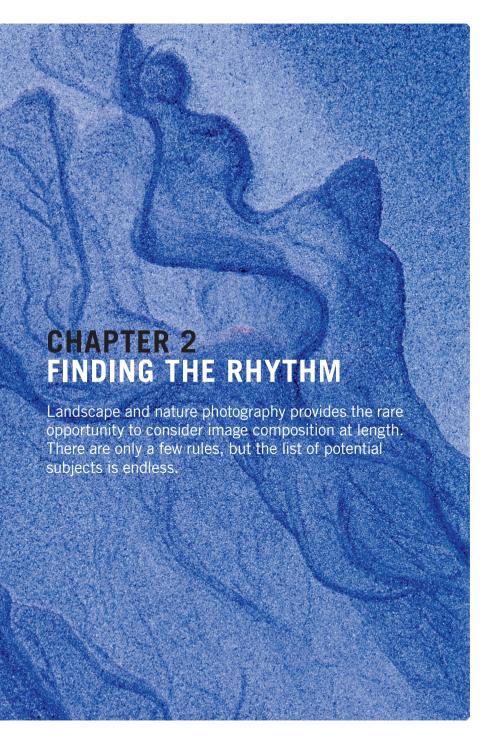
10 After the Sun Goes Down

Early morning's light is fantastic, but the dimming light of dusk can also be great for photography. As the sun gets lower and lower in the sky, the light gets weaker and weaker, creating optimal conditions for creative landscape images. What's most alluring about the light of the setting sun is the chance to portray how it illuminates your surrounding area. The last rays of the sun color the landscape and play with the shadows to create a brilliance and a vitality that can't be found during the day. The bluish light that comes after the sunset provides a fine opportunity to create images with rich tones and complex moods—this is especially true on the coast, where the water is in constant motion and the effects of light are beguiling. If you're ready to forego sleep completely, you can also seize the chance to use the hours of total darkness for some night photography before the sun rises again over the horizon. And afterward, it's time for a nice, long rest.













11 The Right Flow

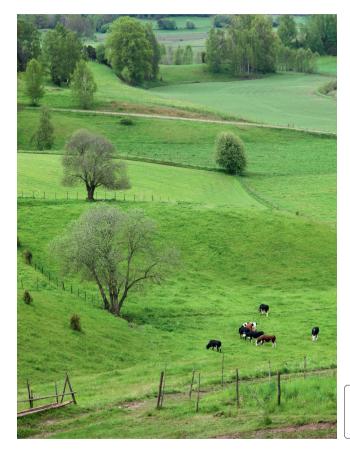
Good photographers know how to create a pleasant rhythm in their images by ensuring that everything contributes to the image's overall feel. Every detail won't be an eye-catcher, but all of the elements should have meaning. There are some tried and true methods when it comes to setting up landscape photos.

An engaging foreground directs the viewer to the middle part of the image and finally to the background. This theory suggests that the foreground, middle, and background of an image each makes up about one third of the image's total area—an idea that works pretty well in practice. First, find the right foreground; a logical middle section usually follows and a fitting background makes the image complete. As you set up your photograph according to this guideline, you can think about any number of details. How should the camera be positioned to get the best angle? How high should the camera be? How much of the image should the sky occupy? All of these questions—plus many more—have an impact on the final result. If you're using a wide-angle lens, shifting the camera even half an inch can have a drastic effect on the photo angle. If the effect is successful you will create a smooth flow from the foreground to the background of your image, and beyond.

HBL 500 C/M, 50MM, F/22, 1/4 SEC., POLARIZATION AND GRADUATED ND FILTERS

12 Paying Attention to Balance

In order to entice viewers to look at your images with interest, your images need balance. If one object stands out in the front left part of your image, another object should act as a counterweight in the back right part, and so on. This doesn't mean you need to include elements that are the same size or that are mirror images of each other—this might cause details to compete with one another—but you should make sure that neither side of your image is too heavy. Linear, triangular, and circular structures as well as emotionally laden image elements can add weight to given areas of an image. The placement of the cows saves this image from leaning too heavily to the left. The three trees in the middle section, the fence posts, and the various fields fit together to create a pleasant balance.



HBL H3DII-39, 150MM, F/11, ½125 SEC.



13 Playing with Shapes

Sometimes things work out unexpectedly. Here I had noticed the clouds in the sky, of course, but it took me a little while to see that the shape of the clouds mirrored the shape of the tree and the tapering field. At that moment I forgot about all of my other ideas and tried to capture this marvel. I adjusted the position of my camera quickly to arrange the elements of the photograph before the clouds blew away. Once you've been taking photos for a while, composing photos becomes second nature; you'll sense what works without being able to explain why—it just comes to you. The correspondence of the shapes is subtle, but it adds a dimension to the image. When fleeting and unexpected natural phenomena occur, it's worth dropping what you're doing to capture the image.

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/5.6, 1/60 SEC.

14 The Golden Ratio

If objects are positioned right in the center of a photograph—regardless of whether the photo's format is portrait, landscape, or square—the effect is static, boring, and aesthetically lifeless. Positioning your subjects according to the Golden Ratio, however, creates a more dynamic image. If the distance from your main subject to the edge of the photo is equal to one third of the photo's width, lines will take on new meaning, spaces will open up, and the image will gain vitality. The Golden Ratio is an ancient scientific concept that has often been used to explain beauty in art and nature. Photographers apply this principle intuitively, because it's easy to sense where the focus of an image should be.





15 Framing the Subject

In this image our view rests on the small tree on the right side of the image and, in fact, this tree and the dirt path are the only subjects that really stand out at all. The rest of the image is more or less nondescript, even though it's cast in the pink shimmer of dusk. Nevertheless, a little work and ingenuity can create a pleasant harmony. By considering the corners and edges of the image, it's possible to create an effective frame that will improve the quality of the image. The blooming tree in the lower left and the hill in the foreground are carefully placed. The upper corners and edge are clean and don't compete with the main focus of the image: the tree, the path, and the pasture. Instead of eliminating nonessential subjects from your images, sometimes it's prudent to include objects such as these if they serve a functional purpose, like this frame.

HBL 500 C/M, 350MM, F/11, 1/4 SEC.





16 Considering the Corners

This may look like a spontaneous snapshot of a catch of fish, but that's not really the case. The fundamental structure of this image is not all that complicated, but I did make a couple considerations when I took it. First, I wanted more eyes in my image than would have otherwise been included in an arbitrary photo; second, I wanted the corners to be quiet. By "quiet" I mean I didn't want them to attract too much attention (and thereby take attention away from the image's main elements). The corners need to be there, of course, but they should be unobtrusive. If you would like something to occupy the space of a photo's corner, try to make it something bold and simple: a tree trunk, a boulder, or something similar. It's best to avoid cramming the corners with odds and ends that don't belong to the image's composition.

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/5.6, 1/125 SFC.

Nedra Wannborga, Öland, Sweden



17 Employing the Edges

The edges of your photograph have the potential to make or break it. The classical line of thinking suggests that you work in thirds: make sure that the weighty lines and shapes of the composition meet the edges at a distance that's about one third of the photo's length or width from the corner. If the subject meets the photo's edge in the middle, the photo is less appealing. Similarly, photos often appear static and uninteresting if they feature objects that run across the border. Define your photo's composition by positioning lines and shapes in different ways at the sides of the image to create a developed structure. In the photo of these two aspens that are reaching toward the sky, the trunks and crowns of the trees never cross beyond the photo's frame at the middle or the corner. The points of intersection are essential to this image.

Zion National Park, Utah, USA

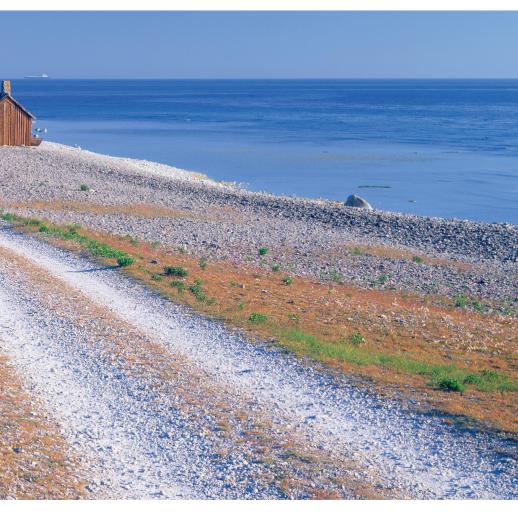


18 Discovering the Primary Lines

LINHOF TECHNICA 9×12 WITH 6×12 FILM, 150MM, F/11, ½15 SEC.



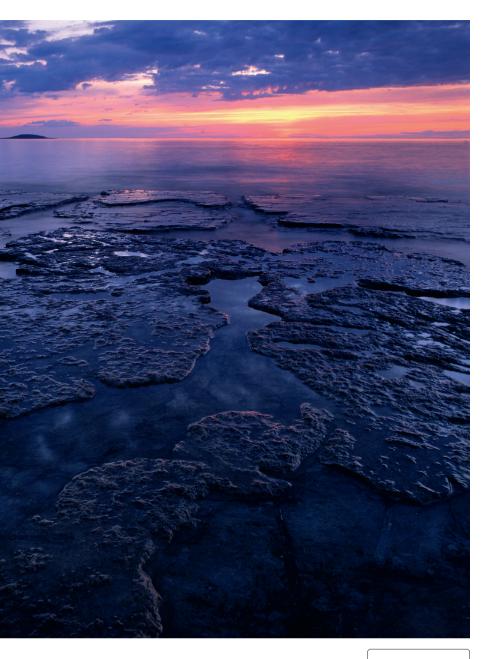
Simplicity is often best. We're sometimes drawn to create overly elaborate compositions devoid of rhythm and harmony. Resist this temptation, find the primary lines and areas, and allow your image some room to breathe. There's an easy trick to help you discover the primary lines of a scene: squint your eyes a little and these lines will come into focus, while all the extraneous elements fade away. Now it's just up to you to bring some cohesion to the whole. In this image, our eye doesn't have any trouble finding its way around; our gaze follows the worn tracks up to the beach hut and then it lingers over the ocean and horizon before it circles back around to the trail. For this sort of image, one that aims to reflect stillness and calm, this composition works perfectly. With simple, clean lines like these, you'll never go wrong.



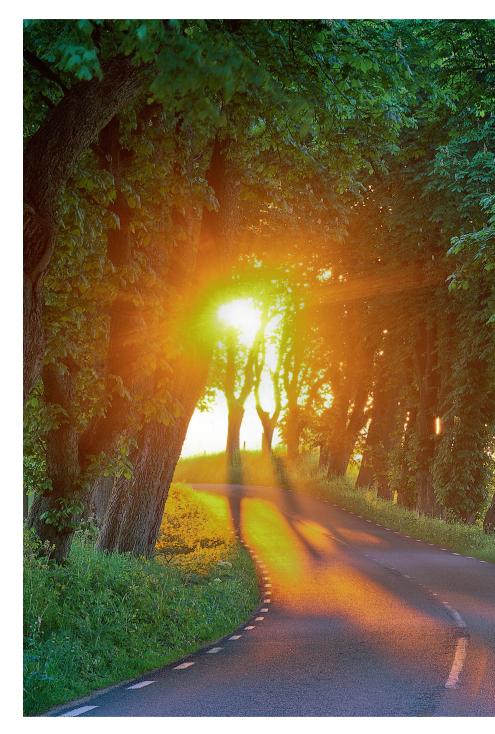
19 Taking the Viewer by the Hand As the photographer, you control two things when it comes to your audience: what they will see (the subject of your image), and how the subject will be presented. The thought that you put into the photograph's construction encourages viewers to read the image in the same way that you did when you captured it. Don't think of this as a burden, though. A nature photo possesses an abundance of feelings and impressions in itself, to which each viewer instinctively and subjectively reacts. This isn't about manipulation; it's about editing an image to help the viewer access it. Aside from the light and the actual subject, your personal perspective is what makes an image interesting. It's a thoughtful photographer who takes the viewer by the hand to show him or her something interesting



and beautiful.



HBL 500 C/M, 50MM, F/22, 1/4 SEC., GRADUATED ND FILTER









HBL 500 C/M, 250MM, F/5.6, 2 SEC. GRADU-ATED ND FILTER

20 The Blue Hour

The sun has decided to call it a day and disappears beyond the horizon. Time to pack up your camera and head home? Not so fast—you've still got one good hour of inspired photography left. The blue hour, or this window of twilight so named because the light creates a distinctively bluish cast, is a rewarding time for taking photos. The final rays of the setting sun create breathtaking effects by lighting up the clouds in the sky, and everywhere you look you'll see something worth capturing. You'll have to use a slower shutter speed, of course, and it's also wise to keep your compositions on the simpler side because dark objects, like large areas of the ground, can appear black even though there's still some light in the sky. During summer, the blue hour can melt unnoticed into morning's twilight in some places, like the north of Europe.

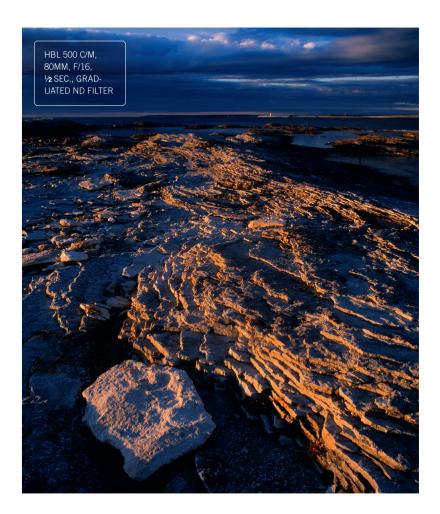
Fykan, Bohuslän, Sweden

21 Exploiting Backlight

Forests are often too dark for photography; sometimes they're pitch black. This can be a difficult hurdle to clear, especially on sunny days when the hopelessly stark contrasts create unmanageable shadows. When faced with these challenges, you can try to turn the dark parts of your photos into an effective backdrop for illuminated foliage. The challenge here is to keep the backlight from hitting your lens and ruining your photo. Try to isolate your subject in front of a dark and calm background to get the best effect with this shot. The contrasts will still appear harsh, but that's not a bad thing; the viewer will have a sense of the sun's brilliance.

Klöva Hallar, Skåne, Sweden





22 Basking in Grazing Light

Nature puts her best face forward in the evening, so it's no wonder that's when nature photographers are busiest. The sun sits low in the sky, casting red-orange rays of light almost horizontally across the earth to create a play of shadows and a dramatic light landscape in which nearly everything looks fascinating. This grazing light produces shapes and colors that simply don't occur during daylight. Subjects, foregrounds, and compositions practically offer themselves up and the biggest challenge is just to be at the right place at the right time. Intriguing light phenomena, such as rays of sunlight breaking through the cloud layer in the minutes before sunset, are difficult to predict, but that makes discovering them all the more exciting.





23 Bad Weather is Good Weather

HBL 500 C/M, 50MM, F/22, ½ SEC., GRADU-ATED ND FILTER

Nature looks best when something happens. Clear days with sunshine and blue cloudless skies or uniformly gray skies that offer neither interesting clouds nor shadows don't make a nature photographer's heart race. When a storm's on the horizon, though, it's time to hit the trail. At the beach, dramatic skies, fast-changing clouds, and interesting light phenomena add an enchanting aspect to nearly every subject imaginable and the light is perfect for creating impressive photos. Of course, storms also have their disadvantages. Slippery ledges and unpredictable ocean sprays pose a threat not only to your body, but to your camera equipment too. The photographs that you take in these conditions are sure to be something special, though, so it's worth sticking it out.

24 Keep Your Finger on the Trigger

Sometimes lighting conditions change so quickly, it's hard to keep up with them. This photo was taken just moments before a thick snowfall enveloped everything around me. I instinctively thought to protect my camera, but the storm left as quickly as it came and after a few brief moments it was clear again. In situations like these, and when taking photos of birds and other animals, everything happens so quickly you don't have time to discern every last detail. It's best to fire off a quick series of photos. Rare lighting conditions and gusts of wind can really press nature photographers for time, so remember to keep your finger on the shutter release button at all times.

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/16, ½ SEC., GRADU-ATED ND FILTER





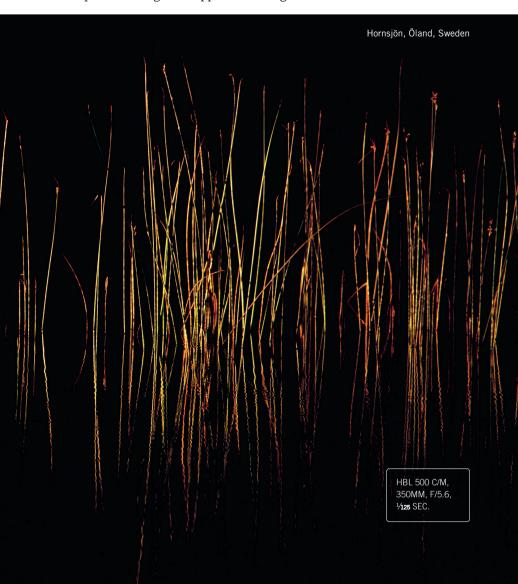
25 Isolated Light

No lighting effect is more alluring for nature photographers than isolated light on a specific subject—most photographers will shoot fast and loose when they come across this phenomenon. It can be a birch tree before a forest illumined by a sidelight, a ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds and dividing the landscape below, or morning's first rays lighting up the stalks of a rush plant (pictured here). Do your best to photograph these sublime images. This effect is pronounced in the morning and



evening when the sun is low and the light hits objects on their sides. You can usually predict when this is going to occur, but sometimes you'll need to wait a while for Providence to illuminate one solitary object surrounded by an area of darkness.

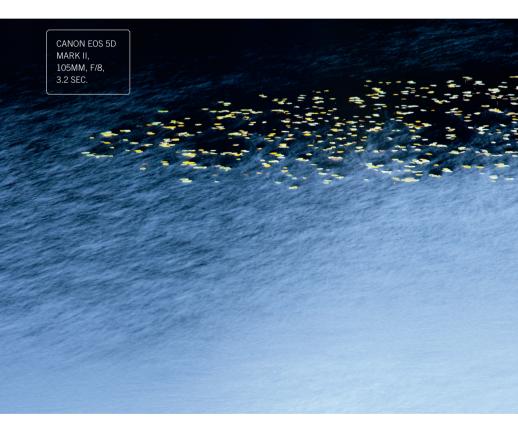
Storms with strong winds can intensify the effect of isolated light. All of a sudden a gap in the cloud layer will form and just a few streaks of light will shoot through to dance on the otherwise dark landscape for a moment. Expose your photo in relation to the sunlit area and you'll capture an image that appears as though it is of a divine nature.





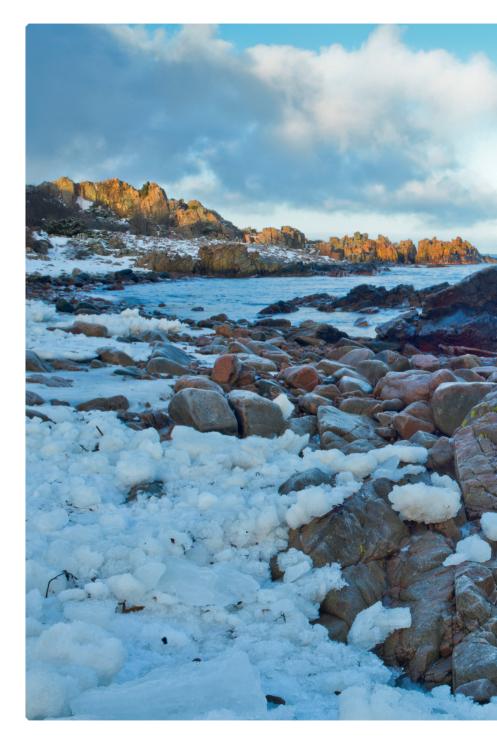
26 Polarizing Filters at Night

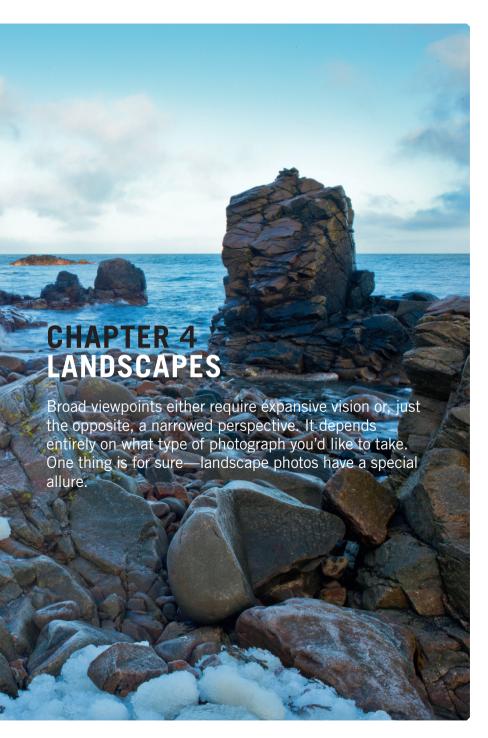
Polarizing filters have several well-known benefits: they eliminate reflections, increase contrast, and improve colors. They're great if you want to make a hazy sky look more blue, for example. People aren't generally aware, though, that they're also useful after the sun goes down and dusky bluish light takes over the sky. Since this is such a rewarding time for taking photos, there's a lot to do and it's easy to overlook your polarizing filter. After years of photographing at night, I've learned that these filters can work wonders during the blue hour, often making the sky look more remarkable. This image owes its *je ne sais quoi* to the polarizing filter. As always, when you employ a polarizing filter to take photos, you need to determine the best angle for your camera—the best choice is usually perpendicular to the light source.



27 Collecting Light

You can achieve beguiling decorative effects when using slow shutter speeds. Even though a photo only captures one distinct moment, intriguing, even dreamlike, effects are produced once it starts to collect movements during the exposure time and make them visible. If you stumble across an opportunity for a "moving" snapshot, try collecting the natural movements of your subject and the resulting patterns of light. In this photo of water lilies, which I took at night atop a high cliff near a forest lake, the sky is reflected in the swirling, glistening surface of the water. I exposed the picture for a couple of seconds to allow the small waves to accumulate, as it were, on the image sensor. I took four or five shots with different exposure settings, but this is the one I like the best. The differences in each stemmed from the strength and direction of the waves and how they moved in relation to the lilies during the exposure.





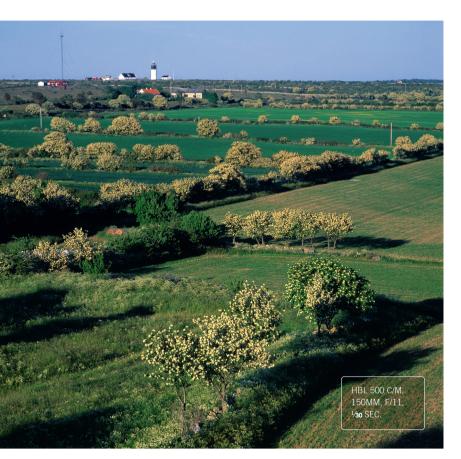




HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/22, 1/4 SEC., POLARIZATION FILTER

28 The All-Important Depth of Field

Special attention must be devoted to depth of field for landscape photos. To ensure that the foreground and the background of your image are in focus, select an aperture on the smaller side (f/22, for example). This will cause the shutter speed to slow down to allow enough light to reach the sensor (making a tripod indispensible). Using the autofocus in this situation can be difficult too; if the point of focus is too far away, the foreground of your image may be blurry, even with the restricted aperture. Setting the focus manually and using the distance markers on the lens is usually a better way to go. The rule of thumb here states that one third of your image should be in front of the point of focus and two thirds should be beyond it, so position the focus a little closer to the camera than to the object of your image to make sure that your foreground will be crisp. Do this precisely—nothing is more frustrating than opening up one of your images on your computer only to discover that part of it is blurry.

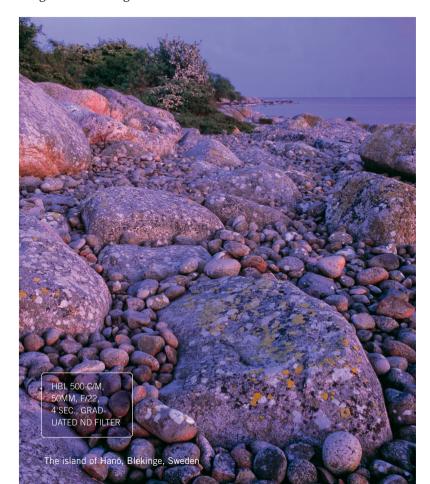


29 Elevated Vantage Points

Your perspective can have a large impact on a landscape photograph. If you're at a low vantage point, the elements of the landscape often appear cramped and confining instead of spread out and open. In many situations, elevating your camera by a yard or so can make all the difference, giving you a better perspective and adding depth to your photo. A stone wall, a boulder, a tree stump, a fence, a sturdy camera case, the roof of a car—use whatever you can to make yourself taller. Without much trouble at all, your image will immediately pack a more powerful punch—the landscape will open up, and your image will fill up nicely from top to bottom. This vertical shift can help the photographer get a better overview of his or her environs and can be useful when setting up an image's composition. Scanning your surroundings for objects to climb will quickly become part of your routine. Up and down and up again—you'll feel it in your legs soon enough, but in the end, the results make the effort unquestionably worthwhile. Let no hill go unclimbed.

30 Wide-Angle Photography

The most expressive way to portray a landscape is with a wide-angle lens. Settle on an interesting object in the foreground and simply let the rest of the landscape unfurl behind it. When done well, the results are fantastic. Remember that when using a wide-angle lens, slight adjustments to the position of the camera can create significant shifts in the photograph's composition. So be precise in regard to the lines and positioning, both in the foreground as well as the background of your image. Is there a smooth transition? Is the image balanced? Pay attention to how much of your image is devoted to the sky. If the sky is empty and monochrome, a small strip of sky at the top of your image will suffice. But if the sky is full of drama you'll want to allocate more of your image's area accordingly. Take your photos thoughtfully; a hasty wide-angle image with an empty foreground can be a real drag. Always make an effort to instill your whole image with meaning and verve.

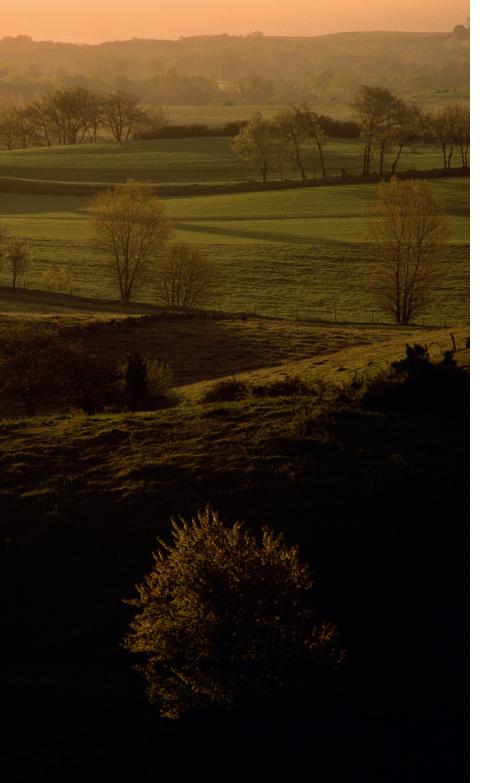


31 Condensing with a Telephoto Lens

HBL 500 C/M, 350MM, F/11, 1/4 SEC.

You can sometimes influence the appearance of a landscape so that even modest hills seem to pile up, one on top of another, making the hills appear as towering mountains, thus creating a more interesting image. All it takes is a good telephoto lens and some crafty directing of the viewer's eye. Telephoto perspectives seem to reduce the distance between near and far objects; they compress your surroundings. It takes some practice to make good use of this effect, though, which can also pose potential drawbacks in your images; you don't want all of the components to appear pushed together on top of each another, for example. Additionally, if part of the photo appears empty, there's little you can do to fix it, regardless of how far away you move. Nevertheless, the considerations regarding image composition are the same with telephoto lenses as with other lenses: create a balance with the various subjects in the photo and keep the corners quiet. Aside from that, fire away!

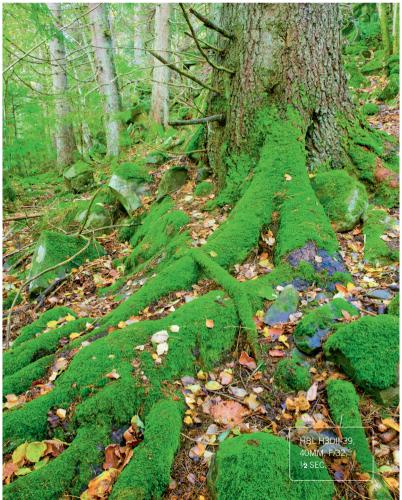


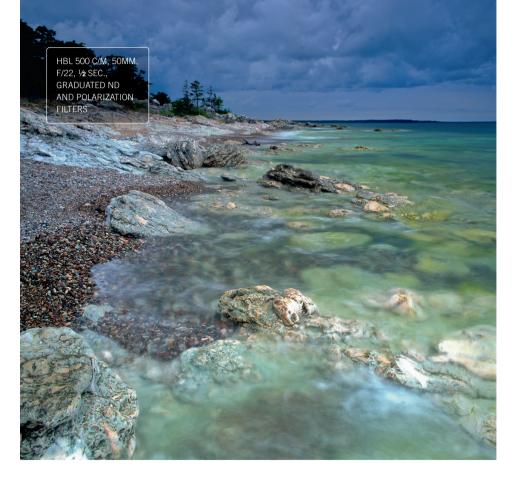


32 Intimate Landscapes

Between close-up exposures and large-scale landscape photographs are subjects that don't always get much attention. Intimate or discrete landscapes, as they're called, are small excerpts from larger environments without a horizon and with relatively few details. It's easy to overlook these subjects. Intimate landscape photos usually establish a relationship between a subject and its immediate surroundings. Once you've alighted on a main subject, have a look around to see if there's anything else that relates to it. The moss-covered roots were what first caught my attention in the image below. The forest was too tall to take a comprehensive photograph, but I could at least capture a few of the branches of the firs in the background to establish the setting: a rocky slope in a forest on a misty autumn day, nothing more, nothing less.

Halleberg, Västergötland, Sweden





33 Adding Ambiance with Clouds

Beautiful, striking clouds make nature photographers happy because they can immediately add value to any image. It can be difficult to feature clouds effectively, though. Usually there's no need to allot more than one third of your image's area to the sky (unless, of course, the sky itself is your main subject). The remaining two thirds should be composed as normal. Keep an eye on cloud formations and think about how you can build them into your photographs. The photo here was taken on a thoroughly gray day on the island of Gotland. Sometime in the afternoon a rain cloud took shape above and started to swell ominously. As it did, a fascinating light phenomenon occurred that caused the water to appear green, as the cloud got darker and darker. A graduated ND filter helped to accentuate the details in the sky and give the image an added kick.

34 Norway's Secrets

HBL 50 C/M, 150MM, F/11, ½15 SEC.

This is probably the surest tip in this book: Norway is a nature and landscape photographer's paradise. Whether you've lost your inspiration or you're just searching for beautiful scenery, Norway is the place to be. The scale and dimensions of its landscapes are so fantastic it's hard to pull yourself away. In the school of Norway's countryside is a great place to hone your craft. Photographs don't take themselves, of course, but it's so gorgeous that sometimes it really doesn't take much thought. I took this photo spontaneously from my car window. You'll be able to take great photos during any season, but summer and fall are particularly beautiful. So, if ever the opportunity presents itself, visit Norway. You won't regret it.





LINHOF TECHNICA 9×12 WITH 6×12 FILM, 150MM F/8 ½25 SEC

Östra Grevie, Skåne, Sweden

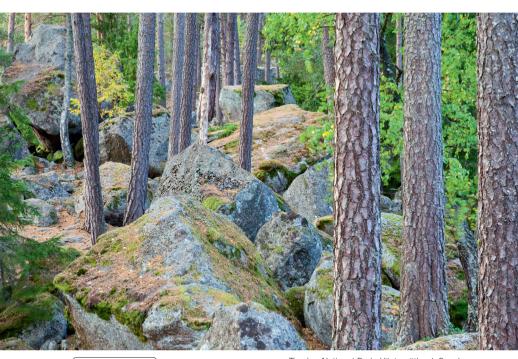


35 The Utility of Maps

Scaled topographical maps are excellent tools for landscape photographers. They can help you remember where you took your photos and they can also help when planning your photography excursions by revealing where to discover potentially interesting outlooks. Dense areas of contour lines in an otherwise open landscape are worth investigating, as are waterfalls in steep terrains, exceptional stretches of coastline, and so on. A map unfortunately won't reveal where rapeseed grows, but it did help me discover this pond surrounded by lowlands and the small hill that I ended up standing on to take this photo. It wasn't until I arrived at the location that I discovered the beautiful weather and vegetation. I couldn't have asked for more.

36 Bringing Order to the Chaos

A dense forest appears overwhelming and indomitable in a camera's viewfinder. Where do you begin to try and find some order within the chaos? It's best to separate the scene into smaller parts; you'll be able to work with these few accessible parts much more readily. If you also remember to keep the edges and corners of your photo clean, you'll manage just fine. There are two groups of trees in this photograph: three pines on the right in the foreground, and another thicket farther back. I made sure the boulders on the left didn't cross beyond the photo's frame. The various green deciduous trees are clipped off here and there, but they function mostly as a swath of color in the image. The focus here is on the arrangement of the pine trunks and the boulders from top right to lower left.



CANON EOS 5D MARK II, 70MM, F/16, 0.6 SEC.

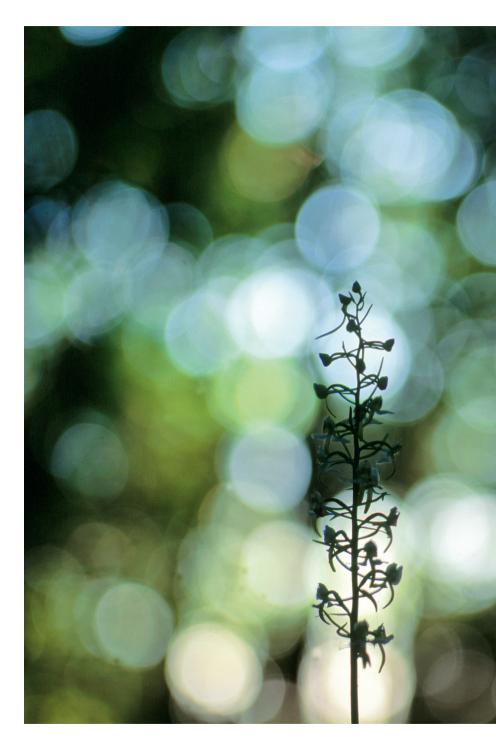
Tiveden National Park, Västergötland, Sweden

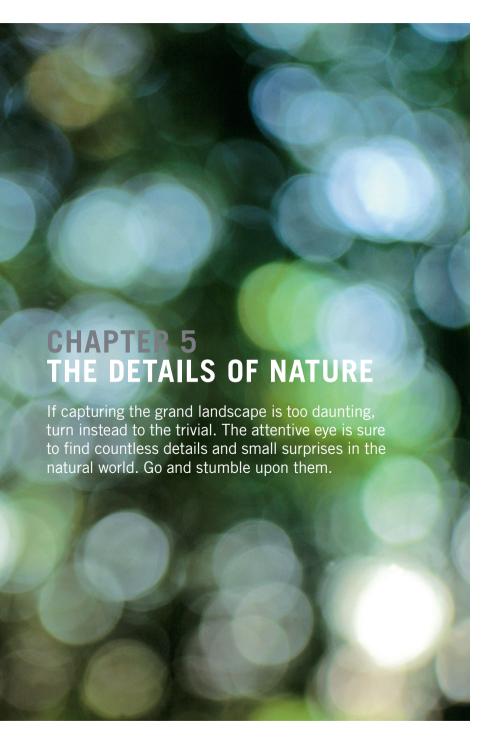




37 The Changing Seasons

Every now and then it's nice to leave the cold, gray weather behind and head for southern latitudes Wetness and darkness don't do much for photographs, but fortunately the weather isn't dismal all year long. If you're lucky enough to live in a place with true seasons, they can be a goldmine as a subject for your photography. Who wants summer all year long, anyway? Certainly not a photographer, because the constant change from one season to the next gives landscapes a rhythm that can be fascinating to study. My favorite season changes all the time. What makes me most happy is the opportunity to enjoy a little bit of each season. So use your camera to take advantage of this even if it means enduring the cold.

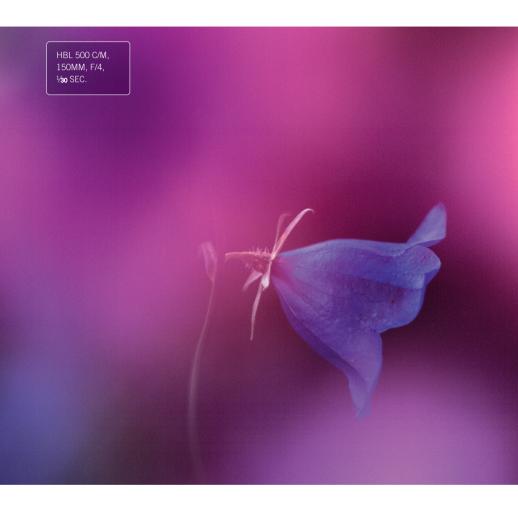




38 The More the Merrier

How exciting is an image of a single pinecone? Not terribly. Detail photographs have the potential to impress, but you need to ensure that they don't come off as documentary. One way around this is to focus on a whole heap of details instead of just one. I found the pinecones in this photo in a small sand pit at the foot of a pine tree and I wanted to create an image that conveyed their multiplicity. This is a simple but effective trick: a photo of many things can be more stimulating than a photo of one thing. A sort of graphic pattern of repetitions and reflections is achieved, but the pinecones are also still individual objects. As with all photographs of details in nature, you must be precise. I took special care to make sure the corners and border of this photo were relatively quiet. I also changed the way a few of the pinecones were positioned so that they pointed upward. It's always a balancing act—if you alter the scene with too strong a hand, the results will appear contrived. I achieved the soft-focus effect with double exposure.





39 Soft-Focus Effect and Blur

Blur can help you create a warm, soft tone, especially in close-up images. When you take photographs of plants, for example, and there's either a dull backdrop or a distracting object that compromises the composition, you can use blur to your advantage. One simple trick is to find a flower, a blade of grass, or a leaf and hold it between your subject and the lens. The thicker the object, the greater the effect. Be careful, because the smallest movement can lead to unwanted gaps in your image or can ruin the soft-focus effect. As a rule, to get the desired result you'll probably need more of an obstruction between your subject and your lens than you'd expect. In this photo I needed a whole bouquet of bellflowers—illuminated by the evening sun—to create the purple soft-focus effect.

40 Isolating the Subject

No other type of photograph is as sensitive to unwelcome details as a close-up. Anything that doesn't belong to the main subject is distracting, so make sure that the focus stays entirely on your target. Keep your subject isolated by removing anything that isn't essential. Don't remove too much, of course; you don't want your photo to look like an aesthetically uninteresting product photo, but do get rid of anything that compromises the clarity or main ideas. As always, the right balance will create the optimal result. Also remember to set your focus as precisely as possible.

HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/8, ½30 SEC.

Lofoten, Norway





41 The Charm of Close-ups

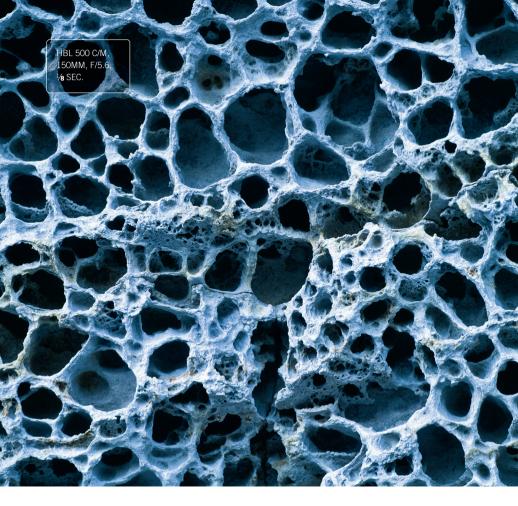


Unless you get really close to your subject for a close-up image, it's difficult to be successful with this type of shot. Being too far away will make your image look unsettled and a little boring, as the subject is likely to be ill defined. If you come across an interesting foreground with an unexciting backdrop, your photo may end up being more engaging if you concentrate on the foreground by itself and omit the background and horizon entirely. The image here was created in just this manner. The yellow ice caught my attention, but the other forms didn't fit well, regardless of how many different perspectives I tried. Finally I let the surroundings go and suddenly the subject came to life. I was left with an image that had three colors and couple of curves—a good photo doesn't need anything else.

42 Making the Ugly Look Beautiful



One of the great opportunities of photography is taking something unsightly and presenting it in a tasteful, positive light. Ugliness can appear beautiful or, at least, aesthetically satisfying. If you think outside the box and focus on colors and shapes, there's no limit to the possibilities. The pitiful dark firs in this photo probably don't appeal to anyone or anything except the animals that call them home. But by focusing only on the tree trunks and a few of their meager branches, I nevertheless captured an interesting image. In situations like these, there's no need to pay attention to anything unsightly beyond your photo's frame.



43 Natural Wallpaper

Homogenous surfaces and repeating patterns that appear in various forms of nature are rewarding subjects for photographs. When such a photograph is artfully composed, it can be difficult to discern the subject in the image or its scale. As a photographer, you shouldn't shy away from these ambiguities. In fact, I suggest just the opposite; an image that obviously comes from the natural world but is difficult to pin down can be very refreshing. The image then becomes an intricate graphic or pattern. This example shows a one-square-yard area of a cliff on Scotland's west coast. I can only infer that a combination of salt water and a rock type prone to erosion gave rise to this pattern. In any case, it will leave the viewer scratching his or her head to figure out what's really being presented.

80 Elgol, Scotland

44 Painted Pictures

Some who are interested in fine art painting find photography too rigid, too sharp, or too documentary—everything that a painted picture is not. Fundamentally, this is exactly what makes taking photographs so special: capturing fleeting moments of reality. But there's no need to swear off your camera to be able to achieve effects similar to those frequently used by painters. This image was created with some help from the wind and a ladder. The downward perspective in tandem with a medium shutter speed allowed the crops in the fields to look like waves and the poppies to look like blurry red spots upon a sea of green. If you're hopeless with a paintbrush, like I am, this is an ideal chance to approximate oil painting.







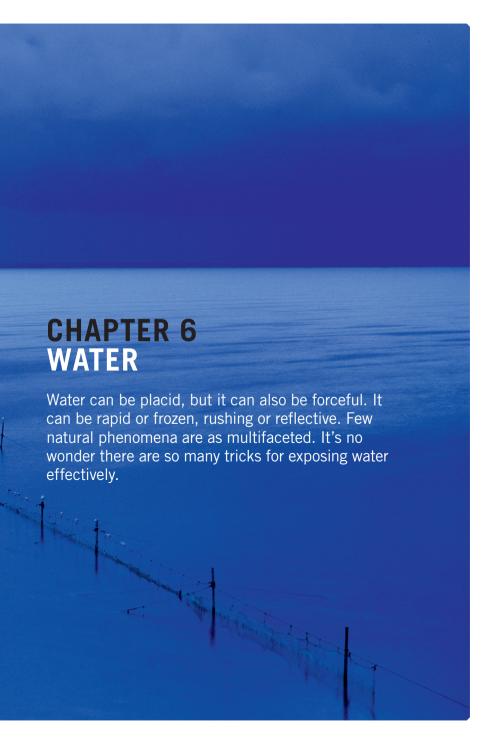
45 Searching for Groups

A golden rule of nature photography is to always look for subjects in groups. This can really benefit the composition of your images, and it's especially useful in close-ups and detail photos that can't rely on a surrounding landscape for support: the main subject is all there is to see. Typically, oddnumbered groups are considered more pleasing than even-numbered groups. A group of two or four elements doesn't quite produce the same effect as three or five—the impression just isn't right. One benefit of composing images out of groups (aside from the fact that natural objects are often found in clusters) is that the interplay of the subjects is easier to establish. In this photograph of five bulrushes, you see two pairs and one that goes it alone. The result is a rhythmic effect and the photo seems self-contained: it needs nothing more and nothing less.

HBL H3DII-39, 80MM, F/5.6, ½50 SEC.

Stensjö village, Småland, Sweden





46 There's No Need to Fear a Storm

Stormy weather at the beach provides tempting conditions for photographers. Images collected here are astonishing because so much happens in them. Make sure you find stable footing when taking photos, though. Every seventh wave is larger than the six that came before it, as they say.

I didn't want to focus exclusively on the foaming waves and bubbling cascades in this image, so I hopped up on a perch that was two or three yards tall to include some of the craggy coastline as well. I also used a telephoto lens to compress the elements in this shot. Here it looks as though the surges are crashing on top of one another. Try taking a whole series of photographs to capture the tide in its various forms and experiment with a variety of shutter speeds. Generally, an exposure time of ¼ second is a good starting point for moving water.



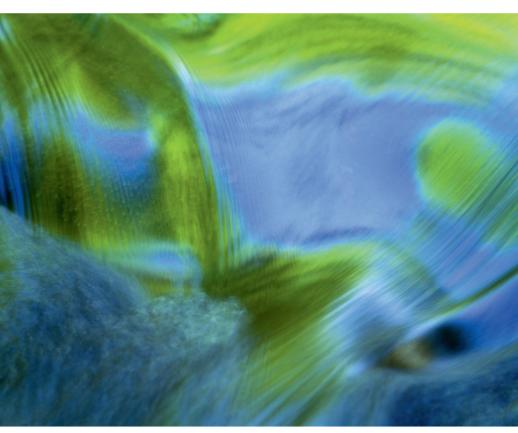
The island of Hönö, Bohuslän, Sweden

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/16, 1/4 SEC., GRADUATED ND AND POLARIZATION FILTER

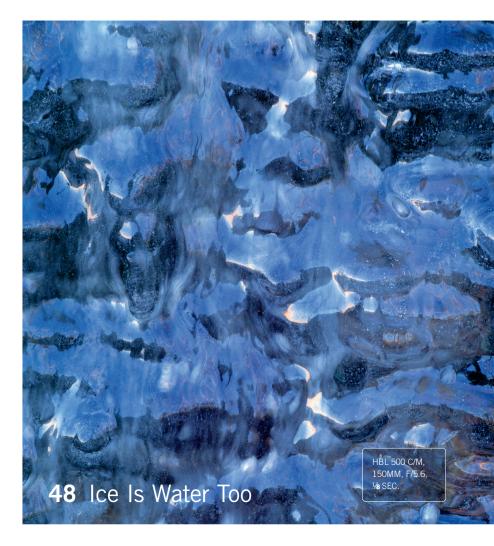


HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/16, ½ SEC.

47 Playing with Reflections



Water of all kinds, flowing or still, possesses the potential for millions of photos. The variations of color and pattern are endless. Depending on what is reflected and how the water moves, different exciting combinations of color and structure arise. Find a good place to stand that allows you to look at the water from the best point of view. To study reflections, it's best to look down at the water at an angle. First have a look around without your camera to take in the surroundings—this is easier than carrying your camera around your neck in impassable areas. The photo above displays a stream in which the colors of the beech trees and the sky are reflected.



Images of ice can be intriguing for a number of reasons. Ice takes on its surrounding colors, it forms fascinating shapes, and it creates optical tricks when you look through it. Encapsulated air bubbles make for incredible patterns—no two photos of ice are the same because it's nearly impossible to photograph ice by itself, completely isolated from its surroundings. Give it a try and you'll find out there's a lot to discover. This photo was taken on a coastal path in the archipelago of Sweden's Blekinge province. Nearby flowing water is reflected in the ice and provides color on its bumpy surface. With a little imagination you can also discover some ghosts and skulls in the patterns. Somewhere in the reflection, I think you can even catch a glimpse of me, or at least my tripod.

49 Freezing the Moment

HBL 500 C/M, 350MM, F/5.6, ½50 SEC.

Cameras are in some ways faster than our eyes. When using a fast shutter speed it's possible to freeze dramatic moments that we otherwise wouldn't perceive. This is especially true for drops of water and breaking waves. Neither is as easy to photograph as you'd expect. Long focal lengths and a healthy dose of patience are prerequisites, since splashes in the face and tall waves are difficult to predict. If you're willing to brave the elements, be prepared to take many exposures. A fast shutter speed—not longer than ½50 second—is necessary to create focused photographs in this situation.







50 Portraying Water's Flow

HBL 500 C/M, 50MM, F/22, ½ SEC., POLARIZATION FILTER

A camera's ability to depict movement in a single frame lends itself especially well to images of flowing water. Depending on shutter speed, you can create images in which moving water appears to be boiling, somewhat fuzzy, completely blurry, or even milky. Long exposure times enable you to create decorative effects, but these should be used sparingly and only as a feature within a larger landscape. It's easy to get carried away with these effects when you first discover them. This image was exposed for a half second, which preserved the interesting textures but also gave the impression of forceful rushing. The water appears smoother than it actually was, but, despite this, its energy is still visible. Exposure times as long as one or two seconds would have caused it to look more like buttermilk. As always, I recommend you experiment a little with shutter speeds and apertures in these situations.

51 Staging Reflections

HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/22, 1 SEC., GRADUATED ND AND POLARIZATION FILTER

Water has a property that makes it photographic dynamite: it reflects. When included thoughtfully, a rock pool or a puddle can enhance an image enormously. The reflections of the sky and clouds in the water give this image a foreground that's to die for. It can be difficult to capture the reflections of the water's entire surface with a wide-angle lens because you have to get so close to the water that the angle won't work. Use a longer focal length and take a few steps back to save the photo's composition. Polarizing filters, by the way, are counterproductive when working with reflections. Even though they'll benefit the rest of the landscape—these filters cause reflections to more or less disappear.





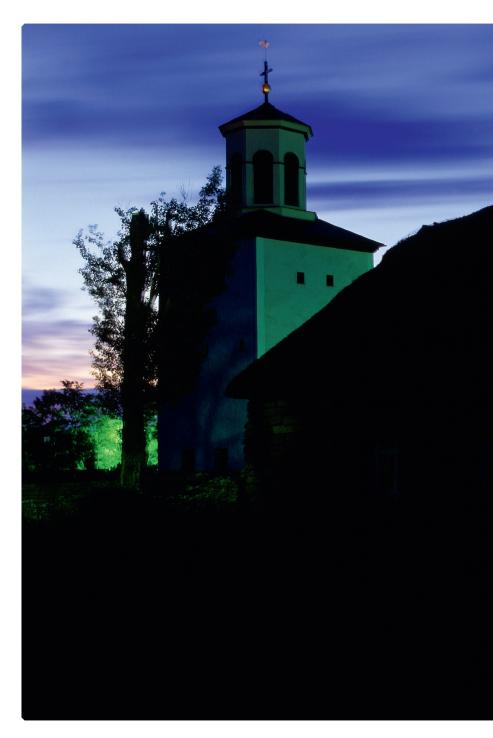
Lakes as Mirrors A placid lake is a good addition to any composition, because it gives rise to an additional perspective. Artist M.C. Escher created a lithograph called Three Worlds, a wonderful image of a lake with autumn leaves resting on its surface and dark trees reflected from above. Beneath the surface of the water swims a fish. The title of the artwork refers to the three worlds that can be seen under, on, and above the water's surface. You can study two worlds by documenting a lake and the images it reflects, and, with a little craftiness and patience, you can include the third world too. Rotate your polarizing filter halfway to remove the reflections from only a part of your image and you'll be able to see below

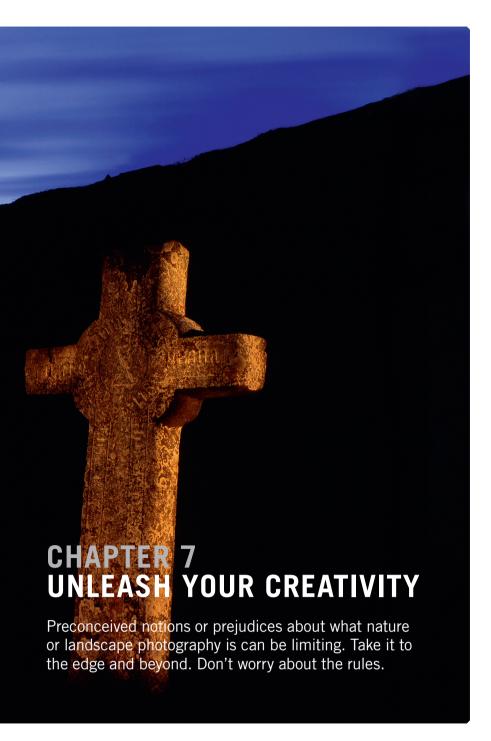
the surface. Now all that's left is to wait for a fish to come along.

53 Capturing the Dramatic

Nature is full of dramatic scenes and events involving water. Powerful waterfalls, forceful storms, and torrential monsoons are resounding demonstrations of nature's power. Capturing this force in a photograph isn't all that easy. All too often the results come across as too tame. So how do you make a photo dramatic? For starters, find just the right moment. It's also important to zero in on a significant detail that amps up the intensity of the photograph; the perspective then becomes more condensed and more accessible for the viewer. Including a person, for example, can be beneficial in terms of establishing scale and showing the force and immensity of water. Aside from all this, the shutter speed you choose will determine whether the water appears frozen in place or milky through the effect of motion blur.













Fykan, Bohuslän, Sweden

55 Multiple Exposure

Some photographs benefit from multiple exposure—the art of exposing two or three images on top of one another—and others don't. Surprisingly, not all modern system cameras are capable of accomplishing this, but if your camera is, you should give this feature a try because technically it's not that complicated.

There's no one correct way to expose an image more than once, but you'll need a tripod for whatever method you choose, at least if you want your image to look concrete. The most straightforward way is to photograph your subject once in focus and then once out of focus. The degree of blur is up to you. To go for a different effect, however, you can take two focused photographs of your subject, but include a slight shift of the camera after the first exposure. The added exposure time is what counts. The art of multiple exposure photography is fertile ground for experimentation and unexpected results.



56 Painting with a Flashlight

Aside from using a photographic flash, you can also work wonders with a plain old flashlight, lending your images a warm mood rich with feeling. A flashlight can also make it possible to control the lighting of specific parts of your image accurately because of its focused beam. You can pinpoint what's of interest to you while leaving the surrounding lighting unaffected. Just make sure to consider the relative exposure of the background.

Night photos often require lengthy exposure times in excess of a minute. You can use your flashlight to paint while the shutter is open. Experimentation will help you figure out how much and how fast to move the light. You can use the flashlight selectively to illuminate parts of the image or the whole thing—the limits of this trick are set only by your patience and imagination.

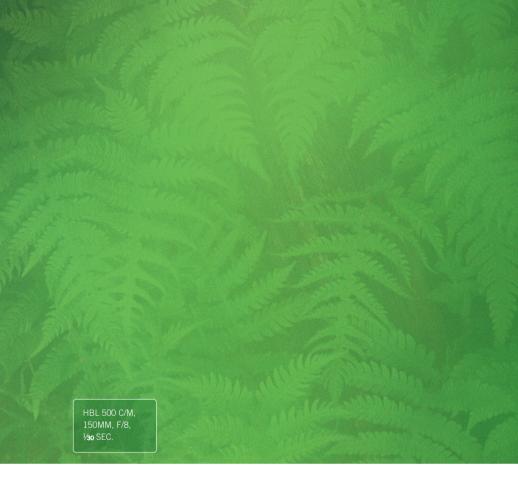
57 Shake, Please!

Moving your camera during an exposure will create an unusual image that resembles a painting. The details will disappear and the blur will cause the subject to look much softer. Tree trunks lend themselves particularly well to this effect, but there's no way to guarantee what your exposure will look like. Fortunately, digital cameras and modern technology make it possible to try over and over again. You'll need to use a slow shutter speed, at least a half second, to give you time to move the camera. The other parameters, of course, are still in play: background, subject, shutter speed, movement, multiple exposure, and so on. So jump right in.

HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/22, 1 SEC.

Ryska Kanonerna, Gotska Sandön, Sweden





58 Breathing on the Lens

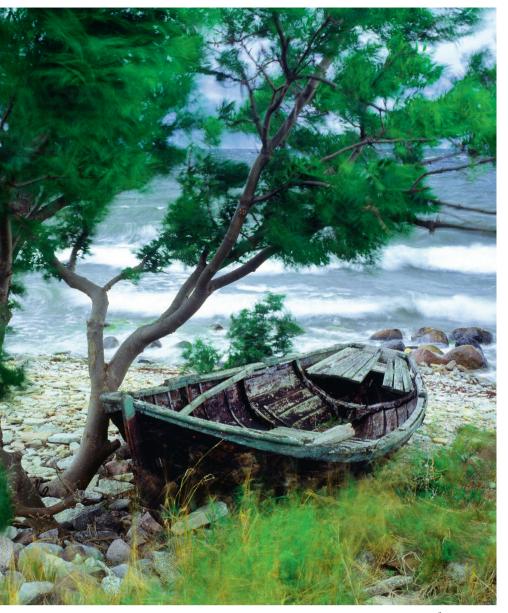
Some photographic techniques have been longer in the making than others. Breathing on the lens to soften the appearance of a subject is one of the oldest—and most effective—tricks in the book. You won't need to purchase any additional equipment for this one, but it's good to know when and how to use this technique. As with other creative effects, it's best to give it a try and develop your own sense for how to go forward. This photograph is 15 years old and was taken during summer in the north of Sweden. I remember that the fern leaves looked a little scant and I had the idea to breathe on the lens with the hope of evening them out and making them appear softer. The image exceeded my expectations, but, to be honest, I don't use this trick much—and now that I'm thinking about it, I don't use it nearly often enough.

HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/22, 1/4 SEC.



59 Nature's Assistance

Sometimes it's okay to take it easy and let someone else do the creative work. The wind can be an excellent partner, for instance. Think about how often we wait for the wind to subside before releasing the shutter so we can avoid blur. Instead of disparaging the wind, though, you could embrace it. Lengthen the exposure time and wait to shoot until the next gust comes along to convey the wind's strength. Anything the wind moves, like trees or grass, could end up being an asset instead of a liability. This effect works best when select areas of the image are out of focus as opposed to the whole image. If there is too much blur, it's easy to lose a sense of the wind. Don't let your camera become a victim of the wind; use a steady tripod or you'll regret it later.



Djupvik, Öland, Sweden



HBL H3DII-39, 40MM, F/5.6, 1/30 SEC.

Billinge, Skåne, Sweden

60 Challenging the Rules

As soon as you learn all the formal rules of image composition, it's time to throw them out the window. You're probably saying to yourself, "But I know so much more now than I knew before, why would I want to do that?" You have to know the rules to know how to stray from them, and this is something you'll want to do to take creative control of your art. For example, when aiming for a photograph that is simple and sleek, sometimes it makes sense to place your subject directly in the center of the composition, as in this image. This composition was deliberate and, in my opinion, worked out rather nicely.

It's refreshing when images challenge fundamental principles and it's fun to work toward new methods of expression. This idea isn't limited to image composition; it also goes for exposure, subject selection, technology, and anything else that can influence an image. Breaking the rules affords insight.

61 Depicting Subtle Landscapes

Some landscapes are quiet and quaint and all too easy to overlook when we're on the hunt for the next great photo. We can easily miss these unassuming scenes that are right in front of us. You have to break your patterns of thought and train yourself to look for them. When documenting these landscapes it's much less about what's in the photograph than it is about how the photograph makes you feel. Subtle landscapes are made up of emotions and moods that work like fractions of a whole. In this photo a couple of bare tree trunks are visible as reflections in two puddles. The image owes its bluish tint to the late time of day and dim lighting. It's a simple photo, but one you can look at for a long time. Once you figure out what you're looking for, you'll be able to discover countless landscapes worth photographing all around you.





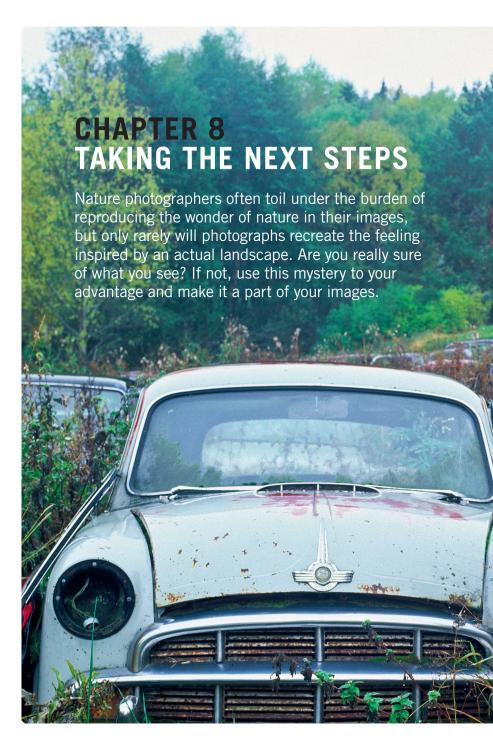


62 Finding Your Own Style

Being creative means finding your own voice as a photographer and figuring out how to approach subjects in your personal style. As you take more and more photos, this process will happen naturally. It's often not difficult to identify a photographer by looking at his or her photos—this is true for professionals whose images appear in newspapers and magazines as well as for amateurs among your circle of friends. Each photographer has particular subjects that he or she is drawn to and each depicts these subjects in a specific way. Both of these things give a photographer a discernable personal voice.

To develop your own style you need to examine yourself, experiment with all kinds of photography, and look for inspiration in the work of other photographers and visual artists. I love landscape photos and ambiguous dreamlike images. This photo of an upturned ball of roots is a typical example of my style. It has a depth of content that invites the imagination to run wild in the middle of an everyday, humdrum setting.

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/5.6, 1/30 SEC.





"Dead End"

63 Ugly But Interesting

Do nature photos always have to be attractive? Other forms of art attempt to stir up a wide range of emotions that extend well beyond aesthetic appreciation. Nature photos often seem to be considered a genre with the exclusive purpose of pleasing the viewer. And it's no wonder; nature is beautiful and people are drawn to beauty. Breaking this convention comes with the risk that your images won't be perceived as nature photography.

This image is anything but beautiful; however, it won't leave a viewer unaffected. The image prods us and forces us to reflect on what we see.

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, EXTENSION TUBE 55, F/8. 1/8 SFC.

Nedra Wannborga, Öland, Sweden





64 Between Fantasy and Reality

Certain photographs give you the feeling that there's more to see than meets the eye. Either through luck or skill you capture something that functions like a sketch—the real details are hidden. Photographs like this are often excerpts of a larger image or the result of experimental craftiness. When I took this photograph, I was actually trying to capture patterns in the foam (which you can still see in the top part of the image) when I discovered something bigger out of the corner of my eye. The water circulated gently so that the figure moved: one arm swayed back and forth and the body slowly started to come together. After many frustrating attempts, I finally found an exposure that worked. Seconds later the figure changed again and shortly after that it disappeared completely. In my eyes this image shows a little dream landscape that's both concrete and abstract at the same time—an exciting interplay of fantasy and reality.

Egby, Öland, Sweden

65 Revealing Nature's Strength

HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/22, ½ SEC., POLARIZATION FILTER

From the earth we were born and to the earth we shall return. The question is whether we've worn out our stay by polluting the environment. How much more can the earth take? Quite a bit, if you listen to some researchers—but that's no reason to carry on with the destruction. Nature is certainly resilient and it's enticing to take photos that confirm this. Take for instance this car cemetery: old, moss-covered vehicles engulfed by nature establish a sort of unusual, living museum. After a few more decades in nature's grasp, the cars will be all the more effaced. And slowly—very slowly—the material will turn to dust and return to its beginnings. A death of beauty, this is, and one that provides a little bit of hope that nature will win in the end, despite everything else.







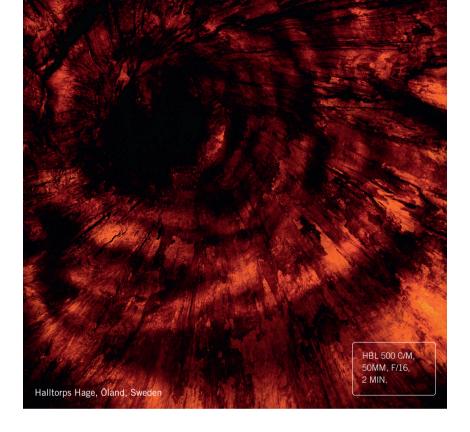


HBL 500 C/M, 150MM, F/11, 30 SEC

66 Mystical Nature

It's prudent for nature photographers to open themselves up to new ideas. Just because something isn't natural doesn't mean it can't feature in a nature photograph—some artificial subjects can enhance natural images. On an evening walk on the island of Gotland, I scaled a high wall near my trail. Elevation is known to be a nature photographer's best friend, but I still wasn't happy with the outlook I discovered. However, as soon as the first car drove by, through the lustrous blue night, I knew how I wanted to compose my image. After a thirty-second exposure I had achieved a supernatural effect that only added to the natural elements in the photo. Is there something mystical afoot or is it just a play of light? Whatever the case, this image goes beyond the realm of typical nature photos.

Hoburgen, Gotland, Sweden



Follow Your Instincts

Sometimes circumstances prevent your best ideas for photos from materializing. Your special equipment didn't work right, you planned to do too much, or the conditions were simply too dangerous to proceed. Don't scrap your ideas, though; hold onto them for another day when the sun is shining and things will go better. I took this photograph on a memorable night when I was crouched inside a damp, half-rotten tree trunk. Fortunately, nobody saw me. I wasn't really sure what I was after, but I had already tried that day to take a photo from the inside of a tree and the results were disastrous. I had the idea to come back after nightfall and try again with a flashlight. I climbed into the tree, set the camera angle roughly, and painted with my flashlight while I left the shutter open for a couple of minutes. I was able to take four or five exposures before I came to my senses and headed home. I have no regrets about this troublesome adventure. You'll have few regrets if you're willing to confront challenges like this one.

68 Telling Stories

A photograph will remain powerful and relevant if its subject conveys more than two static dimensions. Nature often leaves clues about what has happened in a specific place at a specific time. As photographers we can uncover these mysteries and tell the stories. This image does just that. I found this young bird lying on a beach on the island of Sandö near Gotland. It had only been dead for a little while—its feathers were still beautiful and its eyes, usually the first part to wear away, were still intact. I don't know how this bird died, but the clues in the sand intrigued me. You can see the tracks of other birds that approached and walked around the dead bird. Why they did that and what they thought, we'll never know, but the dead body obviously had a meaning for them. For these reasons, I consciously positioned the bird in the center of my image.



69 Becoming a Surrealist

As a photographer, you're likely to come across some mysterious surprises. On my way home from a trek one day I looked up at the cliffs and discovered a completely unexpected object: a computer monitor—in apparent good condition—resting on a jagged rock. This made me think of a story of two hikers who discovered a couple hundred pairs of shoes filled with butter in the mountains. (The shoes ended up being part of an art project.) I decided the monitor on the cliffs was worth a few photos (even though I secretly hoped that no one would see me as I photographed it). There's an inexplicable charm about images like this, a surrealistic aura that is hard to describe even after examining the photograph for a long time. The contrasts in the image are not to be reconciled, but they unquestionably leaven the life of a photographer with humor and excitement



HBL 500 C/M, 80MM, F/11, 1 SEC.





Haväng, Skåne, Sweden

70 Crossing Borders

HBL H3DII-39, 80MM, F/2.8, 1/40 SFC.

When someone asks you how you spend your days, how do you answer? Do you tell them you're a nature photographer? As you look at this image, you may realize that answer won't suffice. The blurry background is green, sure, but nature isn't the first thing that comes to mind. When you're out experiencing the world with your camera, all of your senses are ready to take in whatever comes across your path. There's no reason to turn away from something that's interesting, and it's actually constructive to investigate subjects besides trees, stones, and beaches. "Hem" (or "home," in English) is written on this piece of steel—something definitely worth thinking about.

71 Threatened Nature

Much of nature photography features the positive and beautiful, but we're not doing ourselves any favors by closing our eyes to the negative. Nature is sometimes threatened, often by we humans. Nature photography is a neutral and effective tool to bring attention to relationships in our world that are out of balance.

This monkey spends his life in the setting documented in the photograph. We can't know for sure whether he's happy or not, but I doubt that he is. He's sitting there because of us. This calculated image perhaps suggests something that you wouldn't necessarily see in person, but the fact remains that this is an artificial setting, far removed from the animal's natural habitat. A camera empowers you to compel viewers to look at themselves and their impact on nature.

CANON EOS 5D MARK II, F/4, 1/500 SEC.

Zoo in Ystad, Skåne, Sweden



Epilogue

Early on as a photographer, I felt nature would provide an endless source of fascinating images. With all the distractions of modern life, it may or may not be obvious to us, but nature is the basis of our very existence. Images of nature affect us deeply; they appeal to our roots. Digging for them reveals hidden connections and helps us to understand who we are. I hope this book inspires you to grab your camera and start searching for your own images. First, you need to master a few basic techniques, and make yourself comfortable with the buttons and knobs on your equipment. Then nothing will stand in your way. Use your emotions and desires to guide you. If you do, you will be richly rewarded. You only need to find the beginning of your path. Once you're on it, you don't have to think. Just walk. And see.

All the best, Martin Borg July 2011

Index

A Aperture 13, 59, 93 Autumn 64, 96 B Background 29, 46, 59, 61, 64, 78, 103, 104, 124 Backlight 46 Balance 30, 62, 76 Blue hour 45, 54 Borders, crossing 124 C Civilization 18 Close-ups 8, 64, 75, 76, 78, 83 Clouds (see also sky) Colors 17, 22, 47, 54, 78, 79, 88, 89 Composition 18, 27, 36, 37, 39, 45, 47, 60–62, 75, 83, 94, 96, 108 effective 74 groups 69, 83 thoughtful 11, 40, 61, 94 Contrast 9, 46, 54, 122 Creativity 8, 9, 99	F Filters graduated neutral density 9, 65 polarization 8, 54, 94, 96 Flashlight, painting with 103 Foreground 29, 34, 47, 59, 61, 78, 94 Forest 46, 64, 69 Framing 34 G Groups 83 Graduated ND filter 9, 65 Golden ratio 32 Grazing light 47 H Harmony 14, 34, 39 I Ice 78, 89 Illusions, creating 100 Inspiration 66, 111 Intersections, visual 37
Depth of focus rule of thumb 59 Detail 7, 17, 29, 30, 64, 65, 73, 74, 76, 83, 97, 104, 115 Dinosaur foot 100 Discord, depicting 109 Drama 47, 49, 61, 90, 97 Dusk 24, 34, 54 E Elevation 119 Exposure 9, 64, 103, 104, 108, 120 long 8, 93, 103, 106, 119 multiple short 55, 86, 90, 102 photo corners 74 still 115	L Landscapes 57–71 intimate 64 Light 40, 43, 45, 54, 79, 99 backlight 46 collecting 55 dawn 24 flashlights 103, 120 grazing light 47 isolated 52 phenomena 47, 49, 65 various 8 M Maps 68 Moments 9, 11, 15, 19, 31, 43, 50, 53, 55, 81, 90, 97, 100 freezing 90 recognizing 15

-	unexpected 19
0	Sunset 24, 47
Odd numbers, for composition 83	Surrealism 122
P	Surroundings, homelike 19, 20
Painting 81, 103, 104	Т
Patterns 14, 55, 74, 80, 88, 89, 109, 115	Telephoto lens 8, 62, 86
People	Travel 20
as a part of nature 18	Twilight 13, 17, 43, 45
in photos 18	
Perspective 40, 78, 81, 96	U
expanding 57, 60	Ugliness
compressing 57, 62, 97	but interesting 114
Photo edges 32, 34, 37, 69	making beautiful 79
Polarization filter 8, 54, 94, 96	
	W
R	Water 15, 65, 85, 88, 90, 93, 94, 96, 97
Reflections 8, 54, 74, 88, 89, 94, 96, 109	moving 15, 24, 55, 86, 88
Repetitions 74	calm 13
Rule of thirds 29, 32, 37, 59, 65	Wide-angle lens 8, 29, 61, 94
Rules, breaking 108	Weather 8, 22, 49, 68, 71, 86,
Rules of thumb	storms 22, 49, 50, 53, 86, 97
areas 29	forecasts 22, 43
depth of field 59	White balance 9
groups soft-focus effect 74	
water 86, 93	
waves 55, 86, 90	
Rhythm 27, 29, 39, 71, 83	
S	
Scale 18, 66, 97	
Seasons 66, 71	
Shadows 17, 24, 46, 47, 49	
Shapes 31, 37, 47, 65, 79, 89	
Sky 9, 22, 24, 29, 31, 45, 47, 49, 54, 55, 61,	
65, 88, 94	
Soft-focus effect 74, 75	
breathing on the lens 105	

Stories, telling 121

Style 111

Storms (see also weather)

Subjects 14, 17, 20, 22, 23, 27, 32, 34, 37, 40,

46, 47, 49, 52, 55, 64, 65, 71, 75, 76, 78, 80,

83, 102, 104, 105, 108, 111, 119, 121, 124

Motion blur 97

Norway 66

Multiple exposure 102, 104

Night 13, 24, 54, 55, 103, 119, 120